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JAEI



BY
FLORENCE KIPER FRANK



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J A E L

a poetic drama in one act

by

FLORENCE KIPER FRANK

"

THE CHICAGO LITTLE THEATRE

1914

PS 3511
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I am greatly indebted for help in the verse-form of
“ Jael ” to Prof. Richard G. Moulton, editor of The
Modern Reader's Bible

DEDICATION

TO MY SISTER,
MIRIAM KIPER BUZZELL

Cover design and tail-piece by /
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CHARACTERS

JÆL—Wife of Heber the Kenite.

ABIGAIL—Handmaiden of Jael.

SISERA—Captain of the host of King Jabin.

J A E L

(The scene is the interior of Jael's tent, darkened by the approach of a thunderstorm. There is a low bench near the center of the stage, a table with food at the right, a couch at the left. The tent-door is at the back. At the rise of the curtain, Jael is discovered at the tent-door, motionless, her eyes on the plain.)

J A E L.

Twice have the clouds hidden the sun,
And far off there is a rushing in the air as if the winds
did battle.

A B I G A I L.

Yea, a storm cometh up out of the North,
A black storm over Mount Tabor.

J A E L.

The trees trembled and then were still.
The great oak shivered and now is silent.

A B I G A I L.

I am afeard, Jael.
My knees are as water.

J A E L

J A E L.

The sun reeleth like a drunken man.
He clutcheth at the clouds in passing.

ABIGAIL.

Stand not so still in the doorway.
I am afeard of the black clouds—and of thee also.

J A E L.

Yea, thou art fearful of me,
Who am a black storm on the desert.

ABIGAIL.

Thine eyes are terrible, Jael—
Terrible as lightnings over Mount Tabor.

J A E L.

My heart is terrible within me.
As a dark storm it croucheth,
That hath not yet burst
Nor disclosed its lightnings.

ABIGAIL.

Strange words thou utterest,
Nor may I understand thee.

J A E L

J A E L.

Thou hast a woman's heart, Abigail,
Meek and altogether fearful.
Thou hast the heart of a woman,
Mild, and her desire toward her husband.

ABIGAIL.

Were it not sin otherwise,
Such as the Lord will avenge upon us!

(A pause. Jael moves toward the center of the tent.)

J A E L.

Thinkest thou that Heber the Kenite hath reached the
dwellings of Hazor?

ABIGAIL.

Art thou fearful for thy husband, Jael,
For that he is alone in the tempest?

J A E L *(With veiled scorn.)*

Yea, I am fearful.
Prepare thou the table.
We shall feast when Heber returneth.

ABIGAIL.

Why goeth he to the dwellings of Hazor,
To the house of King Jabin?

J A E L

J A E L.

He goeth to bring news of Israel,
Of the armies of Israel and the encampment.

ABIGAIL.

As a spy goeth he, Jael?
As a spy to the house of Jabin?

J A E L.

Yea, he hath pitched his tent as a spy.
He goeth to betray the encampment.

*(Jael, seated on the bench, is given over to brooding.
Abigail, solicitous, has the purpose of comforting. She
seats herself at Jael's feet.)*

ABIGAIL.

Why, Jael, is thy heart disquieted within thee
And why art thou troubled?
With Israel and with them of Canaan
Thy tribe enjoyeth favor.
Many sheep hath thy husband,
And he hangeth thy neck with jewels.
Children shalt thou have also in the Lord's time,
And perchance thy children's children shall praise thee.
Surely thy lot hath fallen unto thee
In pleasant and peaceful places.

J A E L

J A E L.

Yea, peaceful and pleasant,
And very blessed and sober!
Thinkest thou that I am as the women of the Israelites,
Who cry out to their husbands,
“Lord, lord, give us children or we perish!”

ABIGAIL.

Hast thou no woman's heart within thee?
Art thou as a man?
Hast thou no desire toward bearing and suckling,
And the pattering of little feet in the doorway?

J A E L (*With fierce feeling.*)

Yea, I have desire toward a child, Abigail!
A warrior-child have I desire for—
Fierce, strong-limbed,
And the hair upon his head as the shadows of the cedars.
He shalt hurt me in suckling,
And I shall laugh at the pain of it,
For that he is strong and wilful.
Blue shall his eyes be—
Blue as the pools of Kishon.
The lashes thereof shall be dark and long,
And his mouth a red pomegranate cut at the feast of
Astarte.

ABIGAIL.

Such a son shalt thou have,
By thy husband, Heber the Kenite.

J A E L

J A E L.

Thou liest, Abigail!
Heber the Kenite begets not such children.

*(The storm, which has been muttering, is growing more
furious. Both women are now at the tent door.)*

J A E L.

Is there not now far off
A noise of clashing and of battle?

ABIGAIL.

Far off the wind bendeth the trees of Mount Tabor,
And there is a breaking of boughs and a groaning.

J A E L.

Nay, there is a groaning of men,
And a clashing of swords in the darkness.

ABIGAIL.

The trees bend to the wind
And the river rusheth in fury.

J A E L.

Nay, there is a smell of blood upon the air,
And a sound as of many men dying.

J A E L

ABIGAIL.

Now hear I far off the trampling of mighty horsehoofs—
Or is it the wind riding upon the clouds of the heavens?

J A E L.

Nay, there is a crashing of chariots,
And it cometh ever nearer and nearer.

ABIGAIL.

Now see I upon the face of the plain
A black cloud of men when the lightning flasheth.

J A E L (*With growing exaltation.*)

They battle, Abigail—mighty men!
In the thick darkness they clash and battle.

ABIGAIL.

The river Kishon rusheth in fury,
And the stars rain fires.
The mountains melt;
The steadfast hills are melted.

J A E L.

They battle with lifted arms—
With white, tossing arms in the darkness.
The horsehoofs trample the dying—
The horsehoofs of the prancing chariots.

J A E L

ABIGAIL.

They flee now, Jael! They turn!
They turn and flee into the darkness.

J A E L.

Yea, and the host pursueth,
Driving them on and onward.

ABIGAIL.

Like to a smitten cloud they flee
That the winds of heaven have scattered.

J A E L.

'Tis the host of Israel that pursueth,
The multitude of Jabin that flee before them.

ABIGAIL.

Hath then Sisera of Harosheth been vanquished,
The mightiest man in all the land of Canaan?

J A E L.

One alighteth from his chariot—
A mighty man—the mightiest!
Him have they not put to the edge of the sword,
For his arm is strongest in battle.

ABIGAIL.

On foot he fleeth,
And he cometh ever nearer and nearer.

J A E L

J A E L (*With thrilling significance.*)

What seeketh he, Abigail?
What shelter seeketh he
On the face of the plain in the black darkness?

ABIGAIL.

Nay, I know not—
But I am fearful!

J A E L.

Hither cometh he, Abigail!
Hither to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite!

(There is a moment of silence, and then suddenly, with a fierce gesture, Jael attempts to drive the handmaiden from the tent.)

Out, out, Abigail!
Hither cometh he to me, Jael,
Who shall be blessed among women.

ABIGAIL.

Nay, thou would'st not send me forth
Into the storm and the darkness!

J A E L.

Yea, into the storm!
Into the storm, Abigail!
Be not afraid!

(Striking her breast.)

Here is a tempest darker.

J A E L

ABIGAIL (*Clinging to Jael's knees in a frenzy of fear.*)

I am fearful of the wind—
Of the wind and the breaking branches!

J A E L.

Out, out, I say!
He cometh!
Out, Abigail!
This is mine hour.

(She drives the handmaiden moaning and wailing, from the tent. The cries of Abigail are heard amid the confusion of the storm.

They die away. The mood of Jael changes. She is no longer the woman who reveals herself, but is hiding things enigmatic. She waits and listens for Sisera with a slight smile. As she hears him nearing the tent, she pulls back the tent-flap and goes forward to meet him.)

Turn in, my lord.
Turn in to me. Fear not.

SISERA (*At door of tent—panting, mud-bespattered.*)

There is peace between Jabin, King of Hazor and the
house of Heber the Kenite!

J A E L (*Slowly.*)

Thou art Sisera,
The captain of the host of King Jabin?

J A E L

SISERA.

Yea, I am Sisera!

J A E L.

The mightiest man of valor in all the land of Canaan!

SISERA.

Nay, woman, mock me not!

(He sinks exhausted to bench.)

Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink,
For I am thirsty.

J A E L *(Fetching large bowl of curdled milk.)*

Not water, my lord, but milk—
As befitteth the mighty leader of the hosts of Hazor.

SISERA *(Roughly.)*

My heart liketh not thy scoffing.
Peace, I command thee!

J A E L.

Nay, my lord, I scoff not.
I scoff not at thee, the mightiest—

SISERA.

Peace, woman, peace!
Thy tongue stingeth like an adder.

J A E L

(Jael sets the bowl at his side and fetches a dish of fruit from the table.)

J A E L.

Eat, Sisera, eat!
Feast thou after the fighting.

(Sisera drinks thirstily of the milk. He is about to eat the fruit, when he pushes it aside suddenly, with disgust.)

SISERA *(Broodingly—as in a trance.)*

There were nine hundred chariots—
Nine hundred of clanging iron!
Out of Harosheth rode we, proud and terrible,
And the sun glittered mightily upon our swords and our
breastplates.
Out of Harosheth rode we, valiant and lion-hearted—
Out of Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the ancient river.

* * * * *

The river swept them away;
As an heap the floods stood upright.
They whirled in the mighty waters;
They whirled in the deep and perished.

I alone am fled away before the sword of Barak. . . .
The stars fought from heaven against them. . . .
Nine hundred chariots!—nine hundred!
Then did the horsehoofs stamp
Upon the faces of them that were dying. . . .

J A E L

The kings came and fought.
They took no gain of money.
The kings of Canaan fought
On the shores of the ancient river.

* * * * *

But I am fled away to the tent of a woman
And I feast.
I feast as one who has conquered.
Yea, I am a mighty man and a valiant!
I feast and make merry
In the tent of a wanton woman.

*(Jael, who has been watching him intently, here seizes
a small dagger and attempts to strike at Sisera.)*

J A E L.

Thou sayest that, Sisera!
I am fierce as thou in the combat.

SISERA *(Seizing her wrist.)*

Ho! ho! Thou art a valiant man in battle!
See, I could break thee with one hand.
With my one arm could I crush thee and fling thee from
me.

*(He flings her aside. The dagger falls to the ground.
A pause. Jael then comes softly behind him and clasps
her arms about his neck.)*

J A E L

J A E L (*Seductively.*)

Heber is not so mighty.
Him can I conquer with soft words,
And with my arms twined about him.

SISERA (*Indifferently.*)

Said I not that thou art a whore!
I am not a man for soft words, Jael.
I am not such as Heber the Kenite.

J A E L (*On her knees in front of him.*)

Nay, thou art a man of battle, fierce and scornful,
Such as mine eyes have yearned for.

SISERA (*Striking her roughly.*)

This, woman, for thy mocking!

(Jael for a moment crouches motionless. Then she calls to him softly.)

J A E L.

Sisera! Sisera of the hosts of the Gentiles!
Was it not Jahveh himself
Hath fought from heaven against thee!

SISERA.

What folly sayest thou!
The hosts of Barak have conquered Sisera—
Sisera who has fled away on his feet as a shameless one
And sought shelter.

J A E L

J A E L.

Nay, Sisera, not Barak the son of Abinoam!
Not Barak nor the ten thousand of Israel!

SISERA.

Who, then, hath conquered me, Jael?
Who hath conquered Sisera of the Gentiles?

J A E L.

Their God is a man of war.
Their Lord is mighty in battle.
His right hand dasheth in pieces the enemy.
None can withstand Him.

SISERA.

Never until now hath man conquered me!
Never until now hath Sisera of Harosheth been van-

(With sudden suspicion.)

Sayest thou this so that perchance thou mayest find favor
with me,
And that my heart be softened within me?

J A E L.

Nay. 'Tis for thy hardness I love thee.
Thy hardness hath conquered me, Jael,
Who have never until now been vanquished.

J A E L

SISERA.

Ho, truly I shall rejoice,
For that I have conquered a woman.
Sisera, mighty warrior, hath been defeated of Israel;
But, lo, he hath conquered Jael, the wife of Heber the
Kenite.

J A E L.

Thy scorn is not for me,
But eateth inward.
Thy scorn parcheth thine own soul,
Like a hot wind over the fruitful places.

SISERA.

Yea, woman, thou hast read me truly.
My scorn is not for thee,
Who art as the buzzing fly on the tail of a warhorse.
My scorn is not for thee,
Though thou pray me to be scornful.

J A E L.

For that thou art fearful of me, Sisera,
Thou utterest brave words and mocking.

SISERA (*Genuinely astonished.*)

I fearful, Jael!
I fearful of thee—a woman!

J A E L.

Look at me, Sisera! Look into mine eyes!
Hast thou no knowledge of the fierce strength of desire?

J A E L

SISERA.

What meanest thou, Jael?
What lightnings play about thee?

J A E L.

Look at me, Sisera!
Are not my lips made for love,
And the twin breasts for loving!

SISERA (*Unsteadily.*)

Nay, I am giddy from the fight,
And I have no man's heart within me!

J A E L.

Yea, a man's heart hast thou!
For the heart of a man is the desire toward a woman,
And the desire thereof is strong as death,
And fierce as the lust for the battle.
As the floods of Kishon it whirleth and overwhelmeth.
It is like unto a burning fire.

SISERA.

Take thine eyes from me, Jael,
Lest I be utterly overcome and twice vanquished.

J A E L.

The Lord God of Israel hath vanquished thee,
For there are none shall withstand Him.
He is a man of war;

J A E L

The breath of His nostrils consumeth like the fires of
Mount Sinai.

He hath given His pledge unto Israel,
And the kings of the earth shall fall before them.

* * * * *

But thy gods are not like unto Him, Sisera.

Thy gods are the gods of the groves,

And of the budding vineyards.

Thy gods are of Lebanon

And the sweet smells thereof,

And the fountains of living waters. . . .

The earth leapeth with joy,

And the sap pusheth upwards.

The pomegranates are in flower

And the lilies drop liquid myrrh.

The mandrakes give forth their fragrance,

And upon Lebanon are all manner of sweet-smelling
spices.

Now laugh thy gods in the groves—

Even Baal and Astarte.

Now laugh the youths of Baal,

And the maidens of Astarte sing in the full of the moon
at the doors of the temples.

Madness cometh upon them—

Such madness as now thou knowest, Sisera,

Who art overcome of love,

And with the kisses of thy mouth shalt kiss me.

(She abandons herself to him. He embraces her passionately.)

SISERA.

Jael! Jael! Who art thou—thou strange woman?

J A E L

J A E L (*Mystically.*)

Thinkest thou that I am Astarte, perchance—
The secret one whose kisses the sun waketh in the spring-
time?

Thinkest thou that I am she of the budding earth,
Whom Baal embraces with desire?

Yea, I am Astarte!

And there are secret things in my heart, Sisera.

The secret things of the moon and the waxing and waning
thereof,

And the secret things of the growing places.

The hidden thoughts of women,

And the desire of the maiden who walketh with un-
sandal'd feet under the moon in the growing
season.

Yea, I am Astarte of the temples of love and of the flam-
ing torches,

Of the secret thoughts of lovers and the longings thereof
and the madness!

SISERA.

In truth thou art Astarte, the goddess herself,
Who hast bewitched me!

J A E L.

Nay, Sisera, not Astarte, not the goddess—
But Jael—and woman!

(They are now at the couch, toward which Jael has moved, Sisera, half stupefied, following. He reclines upon it; she is seated on the ground at his side, her hair loosened, her arms upreaching.)

J A E L

SISERA (*In a dreamlike abandon.*)

How wonderful are thine arms, Jael!—
Like unto young saplings at the banks of the river.

J A E L (*In a cadenced rapture.*)

Mine arms are white and slim
As the young trees that shine in the still waters.

SISERA.

How wonderful are thine eyes, Jael!—
Gleaming like most excellent jewels.
Thine eyes are the king's emeralds
Set in white ivory.

J A E L.

For thee do mine eyes gleam.
For thee alone, my beloved.

SISERA.

Thy hair upon thy head is as the purple shadows of the
grape clusters.
Thy hair is as the purple of the evening when twilight
cometh.

J A E L.

My lord is held tangled in the tresses thereof,
Nor shall he be untangled.

J A E L

SISERA.

Thy garments are as sweet-smelling spices.
Aloe and spikenard is the smell of thy garments.

J A E L.

Is my lord made drowsy with the smell thereof!
Is he overcome as with wine of the pomegranate!

SISERA.

Like unto a mist is thy body before me!
What enchantment is upon mine eyelids!

J A E L (*As she wills him to slumber.*)

Thou art overcome of love, Sisera,
And wearied with battle.
Thou shalt sleep, my beloved,
Upon a sweet-smelling couch and pleasant.
A strong man wearied with battle
With battle and with the love of woman!
Thou shalt sleep, my beloved, and wake to delights.

SISERA (*With dreamy indistinctness.*)

Yea, truly, thy lips are made for love,
And the twin breasts for loving.
Thy body is altogether pleasant.
It is made for delights.

J A E L.

As a consuming flame came my desire upon me:
I am eaten with the fierce burning thereof and my heart
is as ashes.

J A E L

Nay, as living fountains came love;
As brooks after the wasting of winter.
Sleep thou, my beloved, to wake to delights.

*(He is now sleeping. She leaves the couch and broods,
apart.)*

Thou wilt go from me, Sisera.
Thou wilt go again to thine own gods and thine own people.

I shall follow the tent of my husband.
I shall return to the Israelitish cities.
There, if any woman be found in sin,
We shall stone her with stones in the gateway.
We shall stone her till she be dead—
I, Jael, with the others.
If any man lie with the wife of another . . .
Thee, Sisera, would they stone and rejoice exceedingly,
For that they had brought low a man of valor.

They shall not stone thee, Sisera!
Rather would I slay thee as thou sleepest,
Than that they shall make mock of thee and scorn thee.

* * * * *

My soul hath blossomed like unto the fruitful valleys;
Like unto the vines that drop with clusters of grapes after
the drought and the hot winds of the mid-season.
Who shall pluck of the fruit of my love?
Who shall eat of the precious fruit of the vineyard?
It shall rot upon the branches and wither upon the stems
thereof.
A waste garden shall be my soul,

J A E L

And the south wind will not visit it because of its desolation.

* * * * *

(Looking down passionately upon him.)

Thine hair is black as a raven,
Black as the shadows of the cedars.
Thine arms upon thee are as pillars of marble,
Thy body as the rafters of the king's dwelling.

Thine eyes are blue, Sisera—
Blue as the pools of Kishon.
The lashes thereof are dark and long,
And thy mouth a red pomegranate cut at the feast of
Astarte.

She that bore thee rejoiced when thou didst hurt her in
suckling.

She that bore thee rejoiced and was exceeding glad,
For that thou wert strong and wilful.

Perchance even now she looketh forth at the lattice.
Perchance even now she awaiteth thee—she and her
maidens.

I hate thee, mother of Sisera, whose soul calleth upon him!
I hate thee that he goeth to thee and to thy people!

Nay, I love thee for that thou hast borne a manchild, a
warrior!

I love thee for that thou hast borne him who is beloved
of Jael of Kenite.

J A E L

Perchance even now she looketh and waiteth.
With longing she awaiteth the wheels of his chariot.
Perchance there waiteth with her another!
Perchance there awaiteth—a maiden!

*(With a cry of anguish she throws herself by the couch
and calls piercingly to him.)*

Sisera! Sisera! Waiteth there a maiden?

(A pause. She rises slowly.)

Like the dead he sleepeth,
And is not moved.

* * * * *

A maiden with dark eyes—a virgin!
With fear she looketh forth through the lattice.

(With malicious mimicry.)

“Why tarry the wheels of his chariot!”

Yea, be thou fearful, beloved of Sisera!
For if indeed thou waitest,
Thou wilt wait long his coming!

Nay, there is no maiden!
He knew naught of desire.
No virgin awaiteth!
He knew naught of the love of woman.

I am his beloved;
He has found me pleasant.

J A E L

I am the only one of my beloved,
And he is mine.

* * * * *

Thou must go from me,
To thine own gods and thine own people.
What shall I but follow the tent of my husband
To the Israelitish cities.
With longing shall I be scourged—
With unappeased desire.
Through the night shall I walk under the moon in the
growing season.
I shall call upon thee, Sisera,
And the winds of the heavens will answer.
I shall call upon thee,
While thou—

In the far days
Surely a woman awaiteth.
A woman of thine own people,
Whom thou shalt choose from the fairest—a virgin!
A woman whom thou shalt kiss
With the kisses I have taught thee!

(She stands for a moment motionless. Her eyes apprehend suddenly a mallet and a tent-pin that lie near her feet. She seizes them with the swift motion of a descending bird and holds them aloft in an attitude of consecration.)

Astarte, goddess of love, hear me!
Astarte of the flaming torches—
Of the secret things of the heart of woman!

J A E L

Hear me, O goddess,
And behold me!
See my deed,
And unto thee sanctify me!

(She kills Sisera.)

Now art thou mine, my beloved,
Forever!

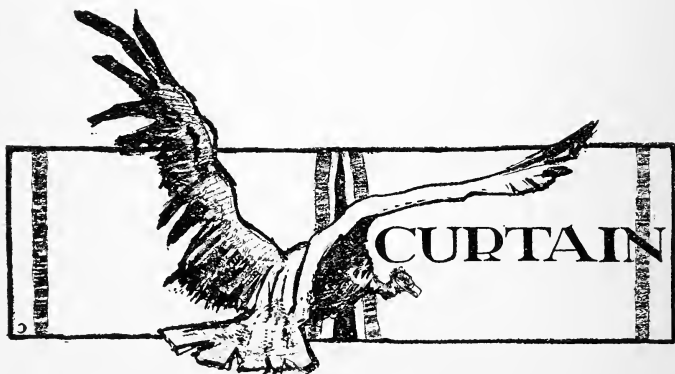
*(A pause. Outside, the approach of soldiers. Cries,
the clattering of arms. Lights.)*

They come—the multitude of Israel!
They come to seek Sisera of the hosts of the Gentiles.

*(She flings wide the tent-door, with arm upraised, ex-
ultingly.)*

Come, Barak, come,
And I will show thee the man whom thou seekest!

(Murmurings, cries, the flare of torches.)



JAEI was originally produced at THE CHICAGO
LITTLE THEATRE on October 20th, 1914, with
the following cast :

Jael Miriam Kiper

Sisera Louis Alter

Abigail Lou Wall Moore

Plays Produced

by

The Chicago Little Theatre

FIRST SEASON

On Baile's Strand	.	.	.	.	.	.	W. B. Yeats
Womenkind	.	.	.	.	.	.	W. W. Gibson
Anatol	.	Arthur Schnitzler	paraphrased by	Granville Barker			
Trojan Women	Euripides	.	translated by	Gilbert Murray			
Creditors	.	August Strindberg	translated by	Edwin Björkman			
The Stronger	August Strindberg	translated by	Edwin Björkman				
Joint Owners in Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	Alice Brown
Catherine Parr	.	.	.	.	.	.	Maurice Baring
The Shadowy Waters	.	.	.	.	.	.	W. B. Yeats
Delphine Declines.	Leonard Merrick	.	dramatized by	Oren Taft			

SECOND SEASON

Columbine	.	.	.	.	.	.	Reginald Arkell
The Maker of Dreams	.	.	.	.	.	.	Oliphant Down
Mr. and Mrs. P. Roe	.	.	.	.	.	.	Martyn Johnson
The Fifth Commandment	.	.	.	.	.	.	Stanley Houghton
Womenkind	.	.	.	.	.	.	W. W. Gibson
Joint Owners in Spain	.	.	.	.	.	.	Alice Brown
The Happy Prince	Oscar Wilde	dramatized by	Margaret T. Allen and				
A Christmas Pantomime			Lou Wall Moore				
Trojan Women	Euripides	.	translated by	Gilbert Murray			
Medea	Euripides	.	translated by	Gilbert Murray			
Hedda Gabler	Ibsen	.	translated by	William Archer and			
			Edmund Gosse				

THE CHICAGO LITTLE THEATRE

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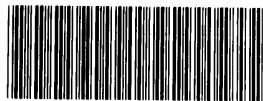
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